

Random Late-Night Thoughts on Prof. Nakata's Paper

by

Zoran Kuzmanovich

Akiko, you have written a richly suggestive paper explicating one of the most complex passages in *Transparent Things*. In doing so, you have argued convincingly for Nabokov's "versioning" of Moore's Paradox. Since the explication was merely a first step, and since you will undertake further research into the connections among Moore, Wittgenstein, Nabokov, and spiritualism, a possible method for expansion would involve linking some of the paths you have already taken.

One way to connect the materials from the final third of the paper to the argument developed so far would be to continue examining the differences between Moore's notion of the paradox named after him and what you call Wittgenstein's "developed arguments" regarding Moore's Paradox. To me, Moore seems interested in implications of first person present indicative for making assertions, expressing a belief, and reporting a state of mind. These are basically situations in which what one asserts conjunctively contradicts what one implies. (210)

The developments you mention take Wittgenstein in a somewhat different direction:

Moore's paradox can be put like this: the expression "I believe that this is the case" is used like the assertion "This is the case"; and yet the *hypothesis* that I believe that this is the case is not used like the hypothesis that this is the case. (PI 190)

I remember having conversations with my colleague Irv Goldstein about Wittgenstein's use of Moore's Paradox. Prof. Goldstein mentioned that Wittgenstein imagined three cases in which Moore's Paradox is neither a contradiction nor an absurdity theoretically or practically. In one case a station master announces the arrival of a train but then says he does not believe it will arrive at the announced time. In another, a soldier writes military communiques but adds that he believes they are incorrect. I have forgotten the third, but I think all three are discussed in Wittgenstein's *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, 1980.

Wittgenstein's way of thinking about Moore's Paradox prepares us for transgendered students who on the first day of class introduced themselves and

utter sentences of the ‘p & I don’t believe that p’ variety, for example, “I am female, but I don’t believe that I am female.”

On the other hand, Moore’s way of thinking about the paradox opens up the opportunity for fictional “versionizing” of the slowly revealed difference between belief and assertion:

(1) A proposition itself does not imply belief: the proposition “it is raining” does not imply that I believe it is raining. “It is raining” ought to be asserted by someone.

(2) A proposition asserted by S does not imply belief. S may say it is raining and be lying. (210)

Moore, G. E. “Moore’s Paradox.” *G. E. Moore: Selected Writings*. Ed. Baldwin, Thomas. New York: Routledge, 1993.

If S is lying, S is violating Grice’s Cooperation Principle of Meaning, specifically the maxim of quality, and Nabokov’s narrators are often experts at such violations.

Since you bought up the presence of *Othello* in *Transparent Things*, if you need more evidence that Nabokov used Moore’s Paradox, consider another *Othello*-animated story, “That In Aleppo Once” (1958). The story uses a narrator who offers several varieties of “p & I don’t believe that p” utterances:

Although I can produce documentary proofs of matrimony, I am positive now that my wife never existed.

Once, however, quite suddenly she started to sob in a sympathetic railway carriage. “The dog,” she said, “the dog we left. I cannot forget the poor dog.” The honesty of her grief shocked me, as we had never had any dog. “I know,” she said, “but I tried to imagine we had actually bought that setter. And just think, he would be now whining behind a locked door.” There had never been any talk of buying a setter.

Having confessed to adultery, the narrator’s wife takes back her confession:

“You will think me crazy,” she said with a vehemence that, for a second, almost made a real person of her, “but I didn’t—I swear that I didn’t. Perhaps I live several lives at once. Perhaps I wanted to test you. Perhaps this bench is a dream and we are in Saratov or on some star.

In *Zettel*, Paragraph 717 Wittgenstein says: “You can’t hear God speak to someone else, you can hear him only if you are being addressed.”-That is a grammatical remark.” If the goal of your research is a longer discussion of the

link between Moore and Wittgenstein's non-raining rain and Nabokov's capacity for spiritualism, a good place to start is this passage from *The Gift*, detailing Alexander Chernyshevsky's final words:

The following day he died, but before that he had a moment of lucidity, complaining of pains and then saying (it was darkish in the room because of the lowered blinds): "What nonsense. Of course there is nothing afterwards." He sighed, listened to the trickling and drumming outside the window and repeated with extreme distinctness: "There is nothing. It is as clear as the fact that it is raining."

And meanwhile outside the spring sun was playing on the roof tiles, the sky was dreamy and cloudless, the tenant upstairs was watering the flowers on the edge of her balcony, and the water trickled down with a drumming sound.

Chernyshevsky's final words about rain ask readers of *The Gift* to complete yet another Nabokov version of Moore's Paradox: "I believe that the afterlife does not exist, but it may."

By the way, *The Gift* is Nabokov's rainiest book, and it offers moments when it seems that it is both raining and not raining:

Stray arrows of rain that had lost both rhythm and weight and the ability to make any sound, flashed at random, this way and that, in the sun.

To your already impressive count of Moore's, you may wish to add the implied subtitle of *Othello, the Moor of Venice*, a tragedy brought about because Iago believes and does not believe his wife Emilia is involved sexually with Othello.